

and Architecture in the English Medieval House,” connects the development of two service rooms in larger aristocratic houses with changes in social organization and particularly the role of food and food service in creating and maintaining social ties. Marilyn Oliva’s “Nuns at Home: The Domesticity of Sacred Space” finds that to a great extent nuns created domestic interiors that were similar to the gentry households in which most of them had been born and raised. Again, the material both conveys and creates profound meaning; Oliva suggests that these domestic furnishings — similar as they may have been to the gentle households of their relatives who lived in the world — nonetheless formed part of the devotional world of the late medieval nun, imbued with spiritual and devotional significance.

Medieval Domesticity explores the manifold meanings of home and household in late medieval England, both literal and metaphorical. Historians of all eras and cultures interested in the “domestic” will find much to think about in this book.

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KRAMER, Alan — *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 434.

Most people would agree that sport, religion, politics, even music can, in various degrees, grip and enthrall societies. Alan Kramer (an associate professor of history at Trinity College, Dublin) reminds us here that the same scenario also applies to war.

Two themes summarize this interesting and informative monograph on World War I and its immediate aftermath: the mass killing of soldiers and civilians, and the destruction — incidental and deliberate — of cultural artifacts. How do we account for such a colossal disaster? The answer is an historic shift in the nature of war. Indeed, the industrialization of warfare, the organizational power of the state (and that includes its military arm) to mobilize all the resources of agriculture, industry, science, finance, and culture, the willingness of nations to be mobilized, and, finally, the firm conviction among all the protagonists that “[t]he enemy was not merely the enemy army, but the enemy nation and the culture through which it defined itself” (p. 31) explain the enormous losses suffered on all fronts in Europe and the Near East — an exercise in self-mutilation without precedent since the Thirty Years’ War of 1618–1648. Not surprisingly, therefore, this dynamic of violence and destruction compelled all belligerents to adopt ever more radical war policies that often violated international law.

It all started with the burning of Louvain and its renowned university library in August 1914 in the wake of the German invasion of Belgium. Acts of vandalism continued relentlessly with the merciless exploitation of occupied territories

and the destruction of lives, property, and agricultural and industrial capital, as evidenced by the mutual mass slaughter of the trenches; the many atrocities committed by Greeks and Turks on one another; the Armenian genocide of 1915; the Russian violence directed against hundreds of thousands of Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, forcibly removed from Galicia by a scorched-earth policy; the horrors of Verdun, the Somme, Passchendaele, and Caporetto; and the Allied blockade of the Central Powers and the recourse to unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans. These all turned soldiers and civilians into legitimate targets of violence and expendable beings, thus adding to the death toll.

Arguably the most interesting chapter is the fifth, entitled "Culture and War." Here the author convincingly shows how many artists, intellectuals, and members of the clergy welcomed the war, seeing it as the only solution to purify a rotten European society; in spite of a gradual disillusionment from 1916 onwards (one related to the realization that there would be no quick victory for either side), they played a leading role in the mobilization of minds and culture — a not insignificant contribution, given the undeniable link between the resolve and resilience of both soldiers and home front and the prosecution of the war.

Kramer concludes his book with an enumeration of the long-term effects of this culture of excessive violence: it profoundly affected soldiers' minds as well as the theory and practice of psychiatry; it loosened the bonds of traditional religious and patriarchal societies; it encouraged pacifism and appeasement in interwar France and Great Britain and, inversely, left its imprint on the socialist experiment in Soviet Russia at its very dawn (witness the devastation of a vicious civil war between the Reds and the Whites); and it facilitated the rise of fascism — "the realization of the principle of war in peacetime, a continuation of war by other means" (p. 300) — in Italy and, somewhat later, in Germany with the emergence and triumph of Adolf Hitler.

Dynamic of Destruction is a well-written book that uses primary and secondary sources in several languages (Italian, English, German, and French). Kramer must be commended for his impressive mastery of the relevant literature (a quality revealed, for example, in the excellent choice of quotes and illustrations), his comparative approach, and his fine and perceptive analysis; nevertheless, more than one reader will be frustrated by one major weakness — the poor structure of the book itself. A few examples should suffice to illustrate this point. The study of the causes of the Great War — one incidentally that puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of Germany and Austria-Hungary — comes after the narrative of the battles involving Italy between 1915 and 1917. The story of Italy is awkwardly divided into two separate chapters. The chronicle of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) comes after that of the origins of World War I. Finally, the review of the literature comes at the very end of the book instead of at the beginning, where it should have been placed. Such an awkward chronological approach reveals less a book than a collection of eight related articles stitched together into a monograph, and will limit the book's utility to scholars already familiar with the story of World War I. Lastly, although much in this book is not new, it is

not without merit. Its best feature, at least in the opinion of this reviewer, is the author's unequivocal condemnation of modern warfare, in particular militarist nationalism — an ideology that has the potential to make destruction acceptable and to involve ever broader swathes of society as both perpetrators and victims. In our brutalized modern world that so glibly devalues life and culture, who can really argue that such a book is not worth reading and meditating?

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MILTON, Cynthia E. — *The Many Meanings of Poverty: Colonialism, Social Compacts, and Assistance in Eighteenth-Century Ecuador*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. 356.

Cynthia Milton's book is a rigorous historical work that treats a complex topic: poverty in colonial Ecuador. It is a refreshing study of *Quiteño* popular sectors and the way they were represented from above, mainly by colonial authorities and institutions of the time. The central argument is that "colonialism necessitated many meanings of poverty, corresponding to the principle of a socio-racial hierarchy," and that idea is developed in the context of dynamics that affected the continuity of the colonial system, mainly the transition from Habsburg to Bourbon rule in eighteenth-century Quito. The exploration of negotiation over symbolic spaces in reference to colonial governance and the different meanings of poverty are very appealing. Nevertheless, one wonders whether the negotiation of symbolic space was determined exclusively by the needs of the Crown, its institutions, and its officials, or whether it involved other processes of empowerment and rapid change in response to native peoples' demands of, and resistance to, colonialism.

The first part of the book is dedicated to the city and people of Quito. There, conflict developed around the ideas of ethnic differentiation, which produced a conceptualization of poverty in contexts of migration and disorder that drew the attention of Crown officials. From the second chapter onward, we follow the strategies of the judicial construction of robbery, beggary, vagrancy, and other behaviour associated with poor inhabitants. It is interesting how this was evolving from purely aid policies during the Habsburg regime towards more "modern" conceptions of control oriented to workers, or potential workers, whose integration into the systems of production was a priority. Bourbon policies towards the poor paid more attention to this integration and less to the correction of their diminished moral standards.

The book shows us how the definition of poverty at the time was used mainly as an excuse for the elites to reproduce and consolidate colonial hierarchies and to legitimize their position of power through paternalistic behaviour, articulated of course to religious discourses. It is not surprising that the poor whom Milton studies are not always the real poor, the *pobreza de solemnidad*, the *misérables*,